

MOLDOVA

PREFACE

Moldova is a picturesque country of rolling green hills, whitewashed villages, placid lakes, and sunflower fields. It has an old-world charm that is hard to manufacture, and some of the best vineyards in Europe. It is densely populated, with numerous ethnic groups represented, but the majority are ethnic Romanians. The economy is heavily dependent on labor intensive agriculture, and Moldova must import virtually 100% of its primary energy. Chisinau is a moderate sized city that has preserved much of its pre-Soviet character, with many low rise, older structures and tree shaded streets remaining in the central city.

With its cultural ties to Russia, Romania, and Turkey, Moldova is something of an enigma. It has risen from the ruins of Soviet socialism to become a democratic republic split in two, one area controlled by the government and the other by separatist rebels nominally loyal to Mother Russia, but it is essentially concerned with making money. The possibility of unification with Romania, its closest neighbor, has been raised, but Moldova has much in common with other former Soviet countries. The official language, Moldovan, is phonetically identical to Romanian. Often business is conducted in Russian; most Romanian-speakers also speak Russian, but many members of the Russian and Ukrainian minorities do not speak Romanian/Moldovan. A government attempt early in 2002 to reintroduce compulsory study of Russian provoked months of protests but no violence.

Originally Moldova was part of the greater region of Moldavia — one of the principalities that made up Romania. It lies directly between Russia and Romania and has long been the focal point for border disputes and expansionist policies. Prior to its tenuous unification, it had been overrun, split up, reunited, conquered, annexed, renamed, and taken back again many times over. It has been a long and bloody journey from the principality of Moldavia to the Republic of Moldova, and it seems fitting that the flag includes a band of red signifying the blood spilled in defending the country.

The region was made a focal point for the diaspora of Magyars, Slavs, and Bulgarians spreading across Eastern Europe. By the beginning of the Middle Ages, Moldavia (as part of Romania) was already a potpourri of different races and cultures.

In the mid 14th century, Moldavia was subsumed under the Ottoman Empire, and it remained under Turkish suzerainty until 1711. In 1812, Turkey and Russia signed the Bucharest Treaty, which gave the eastern half of Moldavia to the Russians (renamed Bessarabia) while the rest of Moldavia and Wallachia became Romania.

Bessarabia remained under Russian control until the 1918 Bolshevik Revolution, when it reunited with Romania as a protective measure. In 1939 the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact handed Bessarabia back to the U.S.S.R., and it became the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (M.S.S.R.). The area was reoccupied by Romanian forces from 1941 until 1944, when the Soviet authorities once again took control.

With the collapse of Communism in the mid 1980s and Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika, reform followed, and finally, in 1991, Moldova declared its full independence.

Moldova has set its sights on European integration, but its prospects remain tenuous as the country struggles to keep all the pieces together and smooth over the contradictions of being part Romanian, part Russian, and wholly Moldovan.

AREA, GEOGRAPHY, AND CLIMATE

Moldova encompasses what was until August 1991 the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, and is located between Romania and Ukraine. Except for a small strip of land on the Danube River, the country is land locked. Moldova is a relatively small country, roughly 300 km long and 100 km across — about the same size as Maryland. Its total land boundary is 1,389 km. Its total area is 33,700 square km. The land border with Romania is 939 km and with Ukraine 450 km. The area east of the Dniester (Nistru) river, along with the city of Bender west of the Dniester, is the breakaway and officially unrecognized Transdnistrian Moldovan Republic, or Transdnistria. Transdnistria is not recognized by Moldova, the U.S., or any other country. Tiraspol is the "capital" of Transdnistria. Moldova's total population is 4.3 million, of whom 715,000 live in Chisinau. The majority of the population lives in the countryside in villages organized around former state farms.

Moldova's climate is mild in the winter and warm in the summer—approximately that of New York City. Winter temperatures are typically in the 20s (F) but occasionally fall below zero. Highs in the summer are typically in the 80s but can go as high as 100. There are four distinct seasons, with foliage on trees between April and October. The climate is semi arid. The countryside is comprised mainly of gently rolling agricultural lands with a gradual slope south toward the Black Sea. Seventy percent of the soil is composed of the famous, fertile "Black Earth" (chernozim) in this region. Because of the clearing of land for agricultural cultivation—especially in the Soviet era for grape production—there are few forests or woodlands. There has been soil erosion due to farming methods. The effect in the cities is that occasionally dust can blow up from the streets in gusts. Humidity in the summer can be high but mildew and insects are not significant factors. Moldova is sparse in natural mineral resources, with some lignite, phosphorites, and gypsum. Moldova has suffered with other countries in the region from serious environmental damage from the heavy use of agricultural chemicals, including pesticides, such as DDT, that have been banned in the West. Substantial amounts of its soil and ground water are contaminated. Because of the extensive use of asbestos in construction, village and urban area soil may have, in some areas, high concentrations of asbestos mixed with the soil. The two principal rivers—the Prut on the west and Dniester in the east—are polluted. Untreated drinking water have heavy metal contamination, as well as pollution from agricultural chemicals.

POPULATION

Moldova has approximately 3,500,000 citizens. It is the most densely inhabited of the former Soviet Union Republics, although the poor economic condition of the country has led over 800,000 (by some estimates as many as 1,000,000) to seek employment outside of the country. About 65 percent of the population is ethnic Romanian, 14 percent is Ukrainian, and 13 percent Russian. The remaining 8 percent includes several ethnic groups — Jews, Bulgarians, and Gagauz (Christian Turks) — among others. Moldova is a largely agricultural country, with more than a third of the population employed in the agricultural sector and agro processing, including the production of wine and other alcoholic beverages (brandy, champagne), vegetables and fruits, sugar, grain, sunflower seeds and oil, cattle and pigs. The population in the countryside is largely ethnic Romanian, with a number of Ukrainian villages, especially in the north. In the main cities, ethnic Russians and Ukrainians predominate. The state language is Moldovan (Romanian), although Russian is extensively used. Most of the population of Moldova is at least nominally Orthodox and Moldova has preserved many Orthodox traditions, including colorful Easter celebrations and church festivals.

Moldova has a proud tradition of hospitality, and is renowned for its wine, cognac and champagne. Many people, even in the city, make their own homemade wines and are eager to share them with visitors. Local cuisine shows the mixture of cultures, with traditional Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Georgian, Turkish, and Jewish foods popular. National dishes include mamaliga (similar to polenta), placinta (a pastry filled with cheese, potatoes, or cabbage), and sarmale (stuffed cabbage); Russian style borscht and caviar are also favorites.

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Parliament amended the 1994 Constitution in July 2000 transforming the country into a parliamentary republic and changing the presidential election from a popular to a parliamentary vote. In December 2000, after several tries, Parliament was unable to elect a president, and President Petru Luchinschi dismissed the Parliament. In February 2001, parliamentary elections were held, which resulted in a new communist-majority Parliament and Government. In March 2005 parliamentary elections, the Communist Party received 46.1% of the vote and won 56 seats in the 101-member Parliament -- more than enough for the 51-vote minimum required to form a government, but short of the 61 votes necessary to elect a president. However, President Voronin was re-elected with support from the opposition Christian Democratic People's Party, the Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party, after Voronin promised to implement a set of reforms aimed at advancing Moldova's prospects for European integration. Parliamentary and Presidential elections are scheduled for 2008.

ARTS, SCIENCE, AND EDUCATION

Chisinau has an active cultural life, especially in classical music, although the institutions have suffered from the economic difficulties of the country. During the season, from mid autumn to late spring, there are regular performances by the opera, ballet, national symphony, and smaller musical groups. The Organ Hall and the Philharmonic Hall are frequent venues for concerts by local ensembles and touring groups. In addition to classical music, traditional folk

music is very popular; Moldovan ensembles such as Flueras and Lautari are well known throughout the former Soviet Union. The folk dance ensemble "Joc" is especially admired for its performances featuring traditional dances from throughout the region. Chisinau also has several theaters performing in Romanian and Russian. The Chekhov Theater performs classic Russian plays as well as some modern works and translations. The Eugene Ionescu Theater performs avant garde and modern plays in Romanian. Several other theaters feature musicals, satirical plays or traditional favorites. A puppet theater in the center of town offers regular performances in Russian and Romanian, and the Circus hosts a wide variety of touring groups in addition to local performers.

Many Americans have been very impressed with the local painters, as well. There are several art galleries in town, as well as frequent exhibits at hotels and businesses.

Moldova has a number of institutions of higher learning, including the State University and the Independent International University, plus several pedagogical institutes and polytechnic institutes. Moldova has a special interest in agricultural research, and the Academy of Science has a large number of highly qualified specialists in this area. English is now widely taught and increasingly used, especially among young people.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Moldova is the poorest country in Europe. It suffered a nearly 65% decline in income since independence before positive economic growth returned in 2000. Moldova recorded its sixth consecutive year of positive GDP growth of seven percent in 2005. This growth is impressive considering that prior to 2000 Moldova had recorded only one year of positive GDP growth since independence. Moldova's performance in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) has been less impressive than for other countries in the region. Corruption, ineffective law enforcement, economic and political uncertainty, and a record of disputes have discouraged potential investors. Relations with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) deteriorated in late 2002, and resumption of much needed financial assistances from these institutions is dependent on Moldova fulfilling various conditions. In FY 2005, the U.S. Government provided an estimated \$27 million in assistance to Moldova, focused on agricultural post-land-privatization activities, regulatory reform, promotion of democratic institutions and civil society, law enforcement, anti-trafficking in persons, and border control. Military-to-military cooperation remained strong based on Partnership for Peace exercises, International Military Education and Training programs, and Bilateral Affairs Operations collaboration with Moldova.

TRANSPORTATION

Automobiles

Left-hand-drive automobiles are used in Moldova. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is preferred and advisable in this environment. Winter can be especially difficult, as roads are seldom cleared of ice and snow, increasing the difficulty of driving on rutted, narrow, often steeply sloped roads.

The Albita-Leuseni crossing in Romania is the most convenient Romanian border crossing for international land traffic. Crossings by car at some other Moldovan Romanian border posts are possible but are less convenient. A traveler should expect possible delays at immigration and customs going in both directions at the Albita Leuseni crossing.

Travelers in cars should expect to be occasionally waved over by local police for routine inspections. Travelers driving by car into the Eastern region of the country (Transnistria) should expect to be stopped by Russian "peacekeepers" and then by Transnistrian "border guards" at the outskirts of Tighina (Bender) and when crossing over to the left bank driving toward Tiraspol. Depending upon where a traveler is driving in or around Transnistria, a car may be stopped by Transnistrian authorities, Russian forces, Moldovan police, or joint patrols consisting of two or three of the above. Discipline of forces in the security zone and at internal checkpoints in Transnistria is problematic at night. The city of Tighina (Bender) is in the security zone. Taking photographs at checkpoints and other "sensitive" sites (such as bridges) in Transnistria is prohibited.

Local Transportation

There is an extensive bus and minibus system in Chisinau, with low fares, but these are usually very crowded and uncomfortable. Non-violent theft can occur on crowded buses, and in a country with a relatively high rate of TB exposure, there are also some health concerns.

Taxis are available by telephone or on the main streets. Taxi companies offer a blend of modern vehicles and decrepit older models, and the passenger does not get to choose among them. Rates are reasonable. Taxis within the city cost between MDL 30 and 50 (\$3.00 - \$4.00). A trip to the airport costs approximately MDL 350 (\$35). Most local cab drivers speak only Russian or Romanian. Two telephone dispatch companies aimed at expatriates do have an English speaker dispatcher and drivers who speak at least some English. Most expatriates rely heavily on these companies, which charge a flat rate of MDL 50 (\$5) per trip.

Between the cities and the towns of Moldova, trains and buses are available at relatively reasonable prices. There are no internal air flights in Moldova.

Regional Transportation

Air Moldova, Tyrolean Airlines, TAROM, Malev, Moldavian Airlines, Transaero, Turkish Air and a variety of regional carriers serve Chisinau. The following major cities are served at least 3 days per week: Bucharest, Budapest, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Kiev, Larnaca, Milan, Moscow, Timisoara and Vienna.

American travelers have also gone to Kiev and Bucharest via train. It is less expensive than a plane, but it is a long, difficult trip. There is no heat in the winter or ventilation in the summer. Some travelers have had problems with border police on the train from Kiev.

Moldova and its neighbors have similar conditions for long range driving. Moldova and all nearby countries use left hand drive, have an extremely limited number of roads with more than two lanes, and have aggressive road police who often stop foreign cars. Driving after dark is extremely dangerous, due to the tendency of Moldovans to walk in the roads in dark clothing,

slow moving, hard-to-see horse carts, and the prevalence of farm animals wandering in the roads.

COMMUNICATIONS

Telephones and Telecommunications

Local telephone service is generally fair to good. Installation of new phones is possible but slow, as are repairs to existing lines. International calls to the U.S. and Europe can be placed via direct dial, and reception is generally good. Rates can vary between USD \$1.50 to \$3.00 per minute depending on the call. Local international calling cards (e.g., DialOK) are now readily available and offer reasonable rates to the U.S. and European locations.

Wireless Service

Cellular phone service is available. Local systems operate on the GSM system with a 900 MHz frequency. All GSM 900 phones will work here, and SIM cards can be purchased from two local companies. Service averages about \$30 per month depending on the package.

Internet

Local internet providers are available and the overall quality of the service has improved. ADSL is now available through two providers (STARNET and GLOBNET) which charge reasonable fees for installation and monthly usage fees.

Radio and TV

Several FM stations are operating. All broadcast a variety of music and programs in Romanian and Russian with some English-language music interspersed.

Moldova has several television stations. Only a couple offer primarily locally produced content; the others rebroadcast Russian or Romanian channels. Shows cover the full range of local and international news plus sports, musical entertainment, locally produced plays, educational broadcasts, movies, and a few American TV shows. Most programming is in Russian, with only a few channels broadcasting most of their programs in Romanian. There are a few movies and shorter programs shown weekly in English (subtitled in Romanian.) TV is transmitted by the 625 PAL D/K European system, which can be picked up with a multisystem receiver. There are reasonable local electronics stores that sell multi-system televisions, VCR's, and DVD players.

Some DVDs and tapes are available locally. DVDs often have an English track, and work if you have a no-code player. Be aware that most are pirated, if you shop at the open markets.

Newspapers, Magazines, and Journals

There are a variety of local newspapers and magazines available in Moldova. Only one has an English page.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

After years of neglect due to insufficient funding, hospital physical plants are in very poor condition — light fixtures are broken, many windows are cracked and in some cases missing with plastic taped over the openings, tiling is falling off walls, floors are old and dirty, there is no ventilation system, heating is minimal and the staff and patients walk around in their overcoats throughout the buildings in the winter and beds appear to be from the turn of the century, to name but a few shortfalls. Although, thanks to significant donations from the United States and Western Europe, medical equipment is being modernized; in general, it is 25 years behind current U.S. standards.

The training and knowledge of the medical doctors in Moldova is below U.S. standards. In general, if a doctor is bright and can speak English, German, Italian or French, s/he emigrates at the earliest opportunity due to the low salary scales and poor working conditions. While sub-specialty consultants and old hospitals are available and utilized for urgent situations, they are not able to perform their best due to medical infrastructure deficiencies.

Surgery and obstetrical deliveries are permitted only in the greatest emergency for stabilization prior to evacuation. It should also be noted that, during the winter months, immediate medical evacuations might not be possible due to the airport being closed.

Local pharmacies in Moldova carry Western and local medicine but only a few of the supplies are in English. Aspirin (made in the U.S.) is available in most pharmacies. Visitors should bring at least a 6-month supply of any necessary prescriptions, including contraceptives.

Community Health

Weather and local sanitation can be problems that aggravate certain health conditions. Garbage pick-up is often sporadic, but street sweeping and sewage disposal are reliable. Winter can be hard because streets and walkways are not cleared of snow and ice, inadequate lighting of streets, and buildings are irregularly heated. During the winter, soot from burning wood and soft coal aggravates sinus problems, asthma and allergies. Dust from unpaved roads and construction may also aggravate these conditions.

Water for drinking and cooking should be distilled, boiled, or filtered before using. After periods of disuse (about 8 hours), turn on taps and run water for a full 5 seconds prior to using for purifying. Bottled drinks are considered to be safe. Cholera has been identified in one of the suburban lakes near Chisinau and in some of Moldova's villages. Cholera can be prevented by treating drinking water and water used for cooking. In addition, fruits and vegetables should be washed, peeled, or cooked.

AIDS and HIV have come to the forefront in Moldova as a public health problem; there have been about 1,200 cases registered. AIDS surveillance programs are being discussed in Moldova as well as programs for screening for HIV and Hepatitis B. Syphilis and tuberculosis are on the rise.

Preventive Measures

All immunizations should be current upon arrival, including Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B, rabies, and meningitis inoculations. Children should have up to date DPT, MMR, and HIB vaccines. Respiratory, orthopedic, or other disorders that prohibit climbing stairs should be considered

before traveling to Moldova. In Moldova, usually one flight of stairs is required to enter a building, and once inside the building, stairs abound, with either no elevator or occasionally a non-functioning one. Western quality non-bifocal prescription glasses are available locally; however, it would be prudent to bring an extra pair of glasses and/or a copy of your prescription.

CHISINAU

Chisinau, Moldova's capital, is located almost in the center of the country on the River Bik. The first written mention of Chisinau dates to the 14th century when the region was under Turkish domination. The old section of town runs along the river and extends up into the central business zone of town. During WWII, extensive portions of Chisinau were destroyed. The post war reconstruction includes many typical examples of Soviet architecture, but the older sections of town retain much of their charm. Despite the size of the city (approximately 715,000 people), Chisinau still has a small town feeling. There are numerous pastel colored single and two-story houses in the city proper, built by traders and merchants in the 18th and 19th centuries. With large trees lining almost all of the streets in the city center, and rose gardens in parks, medians, and even at gas stations, Chisinau is one of the greenest cities on earth from April to October.

The city in recent years has started to see a rapid increase in construction since the end of the Soviet Union. New Apartment Buildings, shopping centers and other high rise building are now more prevalent throughout the city. With greater prosperity and growth, Chisinau has seen an increase in congestion with more and more vehicles on the road especially during the work day. On weekends, the congestion decreases significantly.

SECURITY

Moldova is currently rated a "medium" threat country for criminal activity. Visitors and residents here are generally as safe as, or safer than, in many large metropolitan areas in the United States. Crimes directed at Westerners or expatriates are not common, and most crimes affecting visitors are property crimes or "crimes of opportunity." Visitors should, however, exercise the same common sense precautions they would in any big city: refrain from leaving valuables in plain sight, lock doors to vehicles and residences, be wary of pickpockets (especially in crowded areas like markets and buses), avoid walking alone at night, and try to avoid "standing out" as an American.

UTILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Interruptions of electricity and water occur on occasion.

Electricity in Moldova is 220v, 50 cycle, AC.

FOOD

Shopping for Food in Chisinau

There are four Western quality supermarkets in Chisinau: Metro, Green Hills, Number 1, and Fidesco. These supermarkets have a good selection of Western goods, sanitary refrigerated meats, packed fruits and vegetables and pasteurized dairy products, but prices are higher than in the markets and local stores, and meats may not be as fresh as at the markets. Metro has two stores on the outskirts of Chisinau and offers good prices and high quality meats.

In the spring and summer, fruits and vegetables are abundant in this agricultural country. Every visitor to Chisinau should experience the Central Market — it is the largest market in town for fresh meats, fruits, vegetables and dairy products. There are many smaller neighborhood markets. Most Moldovans have kitchen gardens and poultry, even in Chisinau. In season, you will learn what “vine-ripened” and “fresh picked” really mean. During summer, people eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, and Moldovans spend considerable time canning and preserving for winter months. Beef, chicken and pork are available year round. The latter two meats are of excellent quality: beef usually requires a longer cooking time to become tender.

Dining Out

Chisinau’s restaurants, small and large, are quite good, and with new restaurants. One can have a good meal at very reasonable prices. Some restaurants accept credit cards but prefer to receive cash. Tips are generally not included in the bill, except for large parties. The standard tip is 10%. Reservations are recommended. Moldovan cooking is an interesting combination of Balkan, Romanian, Russian, Turkish and Ukrainian influences. Mamaliga (cornmeal, similar to polenta), feta cheese, and the abundant seasonal fruits and vegetables are staple items. The cuisine is not spicy but uses liberal amounts of onions, peppers, and garlic. Upscale restaurants serve a more international Eastern European cuisine, rather than true Moldovan cooking. There are also Georgian, Lebanese, Azeri, German, French, Moldovan Mexican and Japanese restaurants.

In summertime there is a wonderful explosion of sidewalk cafes with colorful Sprite and Coca Cola umbrellas. McDonald’s has three locations.

CLOTHING

Moldovans are quite fashion conscious, and enjoy getting dressed up for social events, although there are few true “black tie” events in Chisinau. For most formal receptions, a dark suit is the norm for men, and a long or short dress for women. It is a good idea to bring a lot of warm winter clothes, as many public (and private) buildings are only minimally heated during the winter months. Long down or wool coats are a must, as are sturdy waterproof snow boots, since the streets are icy and muddy throughout the winter. Also plan to bring lots of warm socks and gloves or mittens. Locally made fur hats are both fashionable and practical. Clothes are available in Chisinau although they are labeled in European sizes. Quality business clothes are very expensive.

SUPPLIES AND SERVICES

Although Chisinau shops carry an ever greater variety of items, supplies are erratic (though improving) and the price/quality ratio is higher than in the U.S.

The following items are available, although supply, quality, and price fluctuate wildly: toiletries, cosmetics, medicines, first aid items, tobacco products, laundry detergent, and other basic home, recreational, and entertainment supplies.

Basic Services

Generally, basic supplies and services are expensive and irregularly available.

Barbershops are, in most cases, satisfactory. Beauty salons offer a range of services from pedicures and manicures to hair and eyelash coloring. The variety of salon quality products is limited. Therefore, if you use a specific brand of hair coloring and/or treatment products, you should purchase them where available.

Good quality drycleaning is available.

Religious Activities

Although most residents of Moldova are at least nominally Orthodox, Protestant churches have increased their activities in recent years with the increased religious freedom. Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh day Adventists, the Church of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses and other denominations hold services in churches around Chisinau and in many other areas.

There is a small Roman Catholic community, with one Catholic Church in Chisinau. It holds services in Romanian, Russian, Polish, and German (sometimes during the same mass). Occasionally an English-language service is held. There is one working synagogue in Chisinau for the Jewish community.

EDUCATION

Dependent Education

Quality Schools International (QSI) International School of Chisinau is the only school in Moldova offering a US approved international curriculum. QSI is a private, American-owned co-educational school offering instruction to children from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. Enrollment for the 2007-2008 school year was 45 children. There is no American-curriculum high school available in Chisinau.

QSI's after-school activities include computer classes, Romanian, Russian and Spanish language classes, art classes, music, drama and sports. The school has a cafeteria where Moldovan-style lunches may be purchased.

Pre-school is offered at QSI.

RECREATION AND SOCIAL LIFE

Sports

There are a number of private health clubs and tennis courts in Chisinau that are fairly expensive.

Touring and Outdoor Activities

Chisinau has a number of nice parks to walk through, including the Stefan cel Mare Park, downtown, complete with fountain and busts of famous Moldovans, and the Botanical Gardens.

Entertainment

Like any other city, Chisinau has a charm and warmth all its own. Visitors can easily find some interesting activities in Chisinau. In the fall and winter the local opera and concert circuit comes alive. The quality of the performances is good, and tickets are very inexpensive. Chisinau's numerous music schools support and promote classical music. Concerts are held at the Organ Hall, the National Palace, the Philharmonic Hall, and the Theater of Opera and Ballet.

There are two local movie theaters that meet Western standards: comfortable seating, surround sound, and large screens. The Patria Theater screens American movies dubbed over in Russian. The Odeon Theater screens American movies in English with Romanian subtitles. In addition there is a local club that shows films in English throughout the week.

The National Library of the Republic of Moldova carries primarily Russian and Romanian books but has a small selection of English- and other foreign-language books. There are several museums in town, including the Museum of Natural History and Ethnography, the National History Museum, and the Pushkin Museum. (The famous Russian poet lived in Moldova 1820–23.)

There is a new amusement park and a variety of circus shows in Chisinau. Chisinau has a small city zoo and a lovely Botanical Garden.

Social Activities

Moldovans are generally curious to see how Americans live, and will respond to social invitations. They are generous hosts and appreciative guests, as Moldovans are willing to experiment with most foods. The music culture is very deep in Moldova and many people include the performance of music in an evening of dinner with guests.

NOTES FOR TRAVELERS

All flights to Moldova come into Chisinau airport, located roughly 6 miles (10 kilometers) from the city center. There are daily flights to Bucharest, Budapest, Frankfurt, Istanbul, and Moscow, and several weekly flights to Athens, Rome, Vienna and Timisoara. Frankfurt and Vienna are the most heavily used connections, with Budapest as a good alternative.

CURRENCY, BANKING, AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Since November 1993, the Moldovan currency has been the leu (plural, lei; fractions, banii). It is convertible on the current account, and trades at a market rate against any other market currency, though it is not a “hard” currency. Bank transfers can be made into Moldova and bank accounts in hard currency can be opened, but checking accounts are virtually unknown and personal checks are essentially nonnegotiable. Traveler’s checks are accepted by at least some banks and currency exchanges, but commissions for cashing them for hard currencies can be high (for lei transactions, the normal commission is 2%).

Credit cards are only slowly becoming accepted for purchases, but use of credit cards can be risky, so that Moldova remains largely a cash economy. This is in transition, and ATMs are becoming more available throughout Chisinau, although the spread of ATMs outside of the capital has been spotty. By law, all payments in Moldova must be made in lei, not in dollars (many businesses will take dollars, but will convert it to lei at less favorable rates than those available at the exchanges.)

Moldova is on the metric system.

RECOMMENDED READING

These titles are provided as a general indication of the material published in this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Dima, Nicolae. *From Moldavia to Moldova*.

Fonseca, Isabel. *Bury Me Standing: the Gypsies and Their Journey*. New York: Vintage Press, 1995.

Goma, Paul. *My Childhood at the Gates of Unrest*. Columbia, La.: Readers International, Inc., 1990.

Horton, Nancy. *Chisinau, Moldova: The Essential Guide*. Chisinau: Lonely Peasant Publications, 1999.

King, Charles. *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999

Sugar, Peter *Southeastern Europe Under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977.

Hawks, Tony. *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*.